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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the principalship in Alabama. It focuses on the "individual role conception" of the principalship as perceived by those in that role and investigates whether gender affected these perceptions. For the research, principals were asked to provide personal demographic and professional information and to respond to three open-ended questions: What are the three greatest challenges you faced as a starting administrator in this position? What are the three most significant ways in which your presently held position is changing or has changed in the last 5 years? What do you consider to be the five most important skills a new administrator in your position needs to possess? A survey was developed and sent to all principals in Alabama (N=1303). Findings from 514 principals were used for this study. The findings suggest that external pressures, particularly those related to state mandates, the budgeting system, and accountability measures, have increased stress, paperwork, and workload. Male and female principals perceived their roles in similar ways. However, women viewed the tasks before them and the ways in which they must deal with them in a more global manner than did males. For example, they identified the need to make the facilities more inviting because they recognized the impact of "deteriorating facilities" on morale. Women thought in terms of developing a broad base of skills rather than only dealing with a particular task or issue. (RJM)

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The Changing Face of the Principalship in Alabama: Role, Perceptions, and Gender

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The Changing Face of the Principalship in Alabama: Role, Perceptions, and Gender

> As historical record has shown, women have always been second choice in the selection of school leaders....The telling of the story of women in school administration doesn't explain why, in a large sense, women have been consigned to teaching while men are clustered in administration Shakeshaft. (1990, p.81)

Females comprise 51% of the total population of the United States. They hold 43 % of principalships nationwide (Henke, Choy, Geis, & Broughman, 1996). While at first glance their presence in administration may seem almost proportional to their percentage in the population, these figures are deceiving. Women constitute 83% of the elementary teaching population, but only 52% of the principalships. Fifty-four percent of secondary school teachers are females and 26% serve as secondary principals. Only 7% of school superintendents are women (Shakeshaft, 1998). However, the percentage of female administrators in the country has risen over the last decade. There has also been a significant increase of females in educational administration doctoral programs (Grogan, 1996) and students in these programs are now predominantly female (Shakeshaft, 1990). Although the literature of educational administration is replete with research about the role, function, and preparation of school leaders, as Shakeshaft notes above, and Mertz and McNeely (1998) confirm, the administrators studied were primarily white males. Thus just as women have been traditionally absent in the ranks of the principalship, their voices and perceptions of this role have been largely absent in the research of the field.

The recent increase in women in educational administration roles has led to an expansion of gender related research regarding feminine leadership styles and perceptions. Some researchers assert that women and men differ in the way they lead organizations (Chase, 1995;

Gosetti & Rusch, 1995; Helgeson, 1991; Rosener,1990). They suggest that women's leadership style tends to be more transformative and inclusive than that of their male counterparts. Therefore, they suggest this makes woman more capable of adopting a collaborative management approach than men, adding that collaboration is the preferred style of leadership (Grogan, 1996; Aburdene & Naisbitt,1992). In support of this assertion some studies have indicated that females are as effective or better than males in the school administrative role (Shakeshaft 1990; Myers, McKeegan & Bieger 1986).

Others disagree with these assertions and argue that males and females do not differ significantly in the ways in which they lead (Astin & Leland, 1991; Dobbins & Platz, 1986; Eagly & Johnson, 1990). Mertz and McNeely (1996) suggest that the either/or, male/female dichotomy is too simplistic and that a multidimensional approach, which examines context, ethnicity, and other factors is required when conducting research on the issue of leadership style.

This diversity of opinions has led Shakeshaft (1989) to challenge the field to expand the research and theory development conducted to include "nondominant groups," (p.325) particularly women. This, she suggests, will help us understand the administrative world as the non-dominant groups perceive it and allow us to compare this with the predominant view of the white male group.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to examine the principalship in Alabama with a special emphasis on gender issues. Our study sought to uncover what Crow and Glascock (1995) label as the "individual role conception" of the principalship as perceived by those in that role and to investigate whether gender impacted these perceptions. Alabama, like most of the nation, is entering a decade in which there will be a significant turnover in the principalship. Within 5 years, 40% of present principals expect to retire. Another 30% expect to leave these positions within 10 years (Kochan & Spencer, 1999). Increases in the number of women in educational leadership

programs in general, coupled with the breaking down of many of the notions of the principalship as a "male domain," make it likely that many of Alabama's new principals will be female. Therefore we thought it was vital that we accept Shakeshaft's challenge (1990) and sought to include the female voice in a visible and comprehensive manner.

We expect to use this information in redesigning and refining our educational leadership program and will share it with other institutions through the Alabama Association of Professors of Educational Leadership (AAPEL) and with the State Department of Education. We believe the information will be of value to others outside of Alabama as they examine the role of the principal in today's society and the impact of gender on framing, conducting, and preparing individuals for that role.

Methodology

Data Collection

Principals were asked to provide personal demographic and professional information and to respond to three open-ended questions: (a) What are the three greatest challenges you faced as a starting administrator in this position (b) What are the three most significant ways in which your presently held position is changing or has changed in the last five years, and (c) What do you consider to be the five most important skills a new administrator in your position needs to possess?

A survey was developed and sent to all principals in Alabama (N=1303). A postage paid self-addressed envelope and letter of introduction to explain and justify the study was included with the questionnaire. Anonymity was guaranteed to the respondents and their school.

Analysis

A qualitative approach was used in this study. We conducted our inquiry within an open-ended framework in an attempt to elicit the multi-perspective responses of males and females reflected in these settings. The nature of the questions being asked was meant to evoke

first-hand experiential knowledge from those closest to the principalship--the field practitioners.

The demographic information was reviewed and descriptive statistics were used to determine the percentage of male and female principals, their educational levels, and their professional career experiences. The written responses to the three open-ended questions were divided by gender. The three of us analyzed the responses independently using common procedures. Thus we were able to achieve a type of triangulation and strengthen the reliability of our findings. First we organized the responses into initial categories. We then worked with the categories, combining them into common theme areas and assigning a numerical count to them based on the number of responses. Next we identified similarities and differences between male and female responses. Finally we examined semantic differences and nuances between genders.

After completing our initial independent analyses, we developed a decision rule to use in our joint analysis. We began by examining all themes for which any one of us had ten or more responses. Next we compared and combined our themes when appropriate. We then discussed the similarities and differences in responses based on gender that each of us had discovered and made a decision rule that gender differences would be considered valid if two of the three researchers identified them when conducting their independent analysis. When we completed our analysis, we discussed issues any of us believed were important and readdressed any themes for which none of us had ten or more responses, but which seemed powerful or important, to determine if there was any reason to include them in our findings.

Findings

Demographics

Personal Characteristics

Five hundred-fifty, or 42% of the principals responded. Of these, 514 included a designation of gender and only those responses are included in these findings. Sixty-three percent of those responding to the gender question were males and thirty-seven percent were females .

Almost 90% of the principals are 40 years of age or older. Forty-three percent are 50 years of age or older. The average age is 48.3. This is slightly higher that the last reported national average of 47.7 (Henke et al, 1996).

Educational Backgrounds

Table 1 compares the educational levels of female and male principals. Almost half of the males have a Master's degree. Slightly less than one-third have post Master's work or a Specialist Degree and less than a quarter have a Post-Specialist work or a Doctorate. Females, on the other hand are virtually evenly distributed across the three levels with more than one third having post Masters work or Specialist Degrees and more than one-third having post Specialist work or Doctoral Degrees.

Table 1
Educational Levels of Principalship by Gender

	Masters or less	Post Masters or Specialist	Post Specialist or Doctorate	Total
Male	151 (46.6%)	101 (31.2%)	72 (22.2%)	324
Females	59 (31.1%)	63 (33.2%)	68 (35.8%)	190
Total	210 (40.9%)	164 (31.9%)	140 (27.2%)	514

$X(2) = 15.332$, $p < .001$

The data also show that males have lower levels of professional certification than do female principals (Table 2) with about 12 % more females having "AA"(Superintendent) certification than males. To the extent that formalized training leads to greater competence, then, females' preparation exceeds that of the males.

Table 2 Certification Levels of Principalship by Gender			
	Alabama "A" Certification	Alabama "AA" Certification	Total
Males	130 (42.2%)	178 (57.8%)	308
Females	56 (30.9%)	125 (69.1%)	181
Total	186	303	399
$X(1) = 5.67$ (Corrected), $p < .05$			

Length of Tenure in Position

As can be seen in Table 3, females have fewer years in their current positions than do their male counterparts. From those in their first year as principal up through about 8 years in the position, females are more prominent than males. But beginning in the ninth year and going forward, males are over-represented. The maximum time in the job for a female principal is 21 years whereas the maximum for the males is 32 years. It is largely this highly skewed distribution that accounts for a significant difference in the average years in position for females vs. males (5.53 years 7.41 years). Thus women's entrance into the principalship roles appears to have increased in recent years.

Location of Principalship

An important dimension of leadership opportunities is whether school administrative positions within an organization are filled by individuals who are already employed by that organization and/or by individuals who are from outside the organization. As shown in Table 4, principals in Alabama exhibit a marked tendency to come from within their own system. More than 80 percent became principals in the system in which they were already employed. However,

of those who do come from outside the system, more than 75 percent are males. Thus in Alabama females are more likely to become principals in their own systems than are males and it is more probable that males will obtain positions outside of their system of employment than will females.

Table 3
Years in Current Position by Gender

	0 - 4 YRS	5 - 9 YRS	10-14 YRS	15-19 YRS	20 or more	Total
Male	151 (46.5%)	82 (25.2%)	45 (13.8%)	25 (7.7%)	22 (6.8%)	325
Female	98 (51.6%)	64 (33.7%)	15 (7.9%)	12 (6.3%)	1 (.5%)	190
Total	249 (48.3%)	146 (28.3%)	60 (11.7%)	37 (7.2%)	23 (4.5%)	515

$X(4) = 18.10$, $p < .01$

Table 4
Origin of Principals by Gender

	Within Current Sys	From Outside Sys	Total
Male	253 (79.1%)	67 (20.9%)	320
Female	169 (88.9%)	21 (11.1%)	190
Total	422	88	510

$X(1) = 7.48$ (Corrected), $p < .01$

Previous Career Status

When examining the previous career status of males and females, once again, there is a different pattern between the two (as shown in Table 5). Females in this study are proportionally more likely than males to have come to the principalship from the central office or other supervisory positions . More females also have entered the principalship directly from their classroom roles as teachers than have males. In contrast, more males have come to their present principalship after having been an assistant principal or from being a principal in another school or system. In spite of these differences, the trend for both groups is to become a principal after being either an assistant principal in their system or in another or being a principal in another school .

Table 5
Previous Position by Gender

	Supt, Asst..or Assoc. Supt. Supervisor	Principal or Asst. Principal	Teacher, Coach or Other	Total
Male	12 (3.8%)	242 (77.6%)	58 (18.6%)	312
Female	15 (8%)	110 (58.8%)	62 (33.2%)	187
Total	27	352	120	499
$X(2) = 19.9$, $p < .001$				

Perceptions of the Job

Responses to the three open-ended survey questions uncovered commonalties and differences between male and female responses. These findings are organized into three categories, each related to one of the survey questions (a) Challenges of the Job (b) Changes in

the Job (c) Essential Skills for the Job. Each category contains subsets of themes. Female responses to the questions, in general, were more detailed than male responses. For example males tended to provide responses such as 'communication skills," " finance and budgeting," "handling change." Females in contrast wrote, " being a flexible facilitator," " trying to keep up with changes in the budget process," " and "dealing with people who don't want to change anything." Thus it was sometimes more difficult to judge the meaning of the male responses and to categorize them than it was when dealing with female responses.

Challenges of the Job

Four themes shared by both male and female administrators emerged as a response to the question, " What are the three greatest challenges you faced as a starting administrator in this position ? These themes were (a) financial management and funding (b) enormity of the job (c) personnel and communication (d) student discipline and behavior.

Financial Management and Funding

The challenge mentioned most often by respondents of both genders related to two aspects of finances. First was the lack of financial resources to do the job. This was reflected in remarks such as "insufficient financial resources," "low local funding," and "a lack of adequate financial support." Some principals also commented about the need to "find resources" or "seek out new resources."

Principals were also frustrated by their lack of understanding of how to deal with the financial responsibilities they were given. This is reflected in the following representative responses:" understanding how to allocate budgeted funds," "dealing with financial matters," and " having to control the financial aspects of the school."

Enormity of the Job

The second most often identified challenge for principals of both genders was the demands of the job. Comments clustered around two themes a) a lack of experience to fulfill their

responsibilities, and b) the feeling of being overloaded by the demands placed upon them.

Both male and female administrators listed their lack of administrative experience as a challenge they faced as beginning administrators. However, it was mentioned more often by women than men. Several respondents commented on the challenge of being " ill-prepared before taking the job" and a "lack of orientation to system and policies." Many women spoke of "not having the experience" and "lacking confidence. " A minority of them also mentioned the difficulty of being the only female in their position.

Although both groups identified their overwhelming workload as a major challenge, females identified this almost twice as often as males. The ways in which they wrote about this challenge was also somewhat different. The essence of the comments made by males was, "How can I accomplish my goals and manage what needs to get done." Men were more focused upon specific tasks as noted in comments such as "finding time to accomplish everything," " finding time to manage the work," and "finding time to manage athletics."

Women's comments seemed to ask the question, " How can I learn to live and work with these demands ?" Women spoke in more global terms remarking about such things as the need to "develop time management skills," "manage the work load," and learn how to prioritize tasks."

Personnel and Communication

Although both males and females wrote about challenges related to communicating with others, there were notable differences in the manner in which they framed this issue. Male responses dealt with communicating with personnel from a "control and manage" perspective. Typical comments were "controlling and dealing with teacher apathy," motivating others to do what they need to do," " dealing with personnel problems," and "getting better faculties." Males also identified the need to bring about change through such comments as "hiring new quality staff," "getting people to change," and "gaining control."

In contrast, female responses dealt with creating a climate in which people would work together more effectively. For example they wrote of " developing team building skills," " bringing community and school staff together," "building a climate of trust and enhancing morale," and "building shared decision-making teams to bring about change."

Student Discipline and Behavior

Although not mentioned as often as the other three themes, both males and females identified dealing with student discipline and behavior as a challenge. This theme was more prevalent with males than females, but the responses about the issue were similar in nature. The comments fell into two groups. The first dealt with establishing control on a school-wide basis. Representative remarks were: "dealing with school discipline," "establishing discipline," "adherence to the rules and regulations," and "establishing ground rules for disciplining student behavior." The second type of challenge was dealing with individual discipline problems. Some examples of this challenge were " handling conflicts (discipline problems)," "dealing with emotionally conflicted students," and "spending more time with the individual rights of the student."

Facilities

One aspect of the job which was mentioned almost exclusively by females as challenging was dealing with the physical plant. This challenge was not mentioned by a large number of women, but was present in sufficient numbers to be noted as part of the findings. In many cases, they also noted the relationship of this challenge to the operation and climate of the school. Typical comments were "safety issues related to the deteriorating facilities," "getting students to take pride in the building," and "the impact of the poor facilities on morale."

Changes in the Job

All principals reported major changes in the job over the past decade. Common topics emerged from the responses of males and females although within these responses there were

some gender based differences in how these changes were perceived. Except for one theme (site-based management), the changes identified were primarily the result of external factors which impacted upon the school and thus the role of the school administrator. There were five themes dealing with changes in the job (a) broadened accountability (b) expanded technology (c) lack of parental and community support (d) increased student problems (d) implementing site-based management.

Broadened Accountability

The change most often noted by principals was the broadened accountability demands placed upon them. Most notable of these was having school and administrative effectiveness being measured by results on test scores. Comments included "job security is based on SAT scores," "termination will occur if academic progress is not made," and " test scores have become the tail that wags the dog." Other state mandates were also identified in this theme. Among the most prominent were budgeting and financing, particularly the state accounting system, teacher evaluation, and "unfunded mandates." When dealing with this theme, males spoke more often about the issue of test scores and mandates. Women spoke more of the increased paperwork that resulted from increased accountability pressures. Both groups also mentioned legal issues and mandates related to special education as changes in the job which also increases their workload and paperwork requirements.

Expansion of technology

The impact of technology was mentioned by both males and females as an area of change for them. They spoke of this change primarily in terms of the impact technology has on the management, budgeting, and finance processes. Typical examples were "more technology oriented," "technology advances," and "demands for new technology." Interestingly none of the comments specifically related to the use of technology in instruction.

Lack of parental and community support

Principals of both genders wrote that parents and the community have become less supportive of them and the school, making their jobs more difficult. This change has made dealing with children more problematic and has resulted in an increase in "negative attitudes" toward the school. In turn principals noted that they have to spend more time dealing with "public relations." Although principals state that parents seem to have "more concerns" and be making "more demands," they also report that this is coupled with a "lack of parent support for dealing with discipline problems," an inability to "get parents involved in the educational process," and " a reduced level of respect for the principal."

Increased student problems

Males and females noted an increase in problems related to students. These difficulties were of two types (a) general student problems (b) disciplining and managing student behavior. Within the theme of general student problems, both groups of principals made comments regarding students problems not necessarily related to the school. Among the representative comments were "drug abuse," "the breakdown of family values," " family and community violence," and " increases in emotional conflicted children and children with ADHD (attention deficit disorders)."

Although both men and women identified increases in student disciplinary problems as changes in the job, females mentioned this more often than males. Both wrote of such things as having to deal with "serious student discipline problems" " dealing with student apathy," and " handling the lack of respect from students."

Implementing site-based management

The only change in the job that focused primarily on the way in which schools are managed and led was site-based management. Although males and females listed issues related to site-based management as changes in their job, females identified this as a change three times

more often than males. Since there were more male respondents in the survey then males, the difference in importance placed on this issue by women is even greater than that figure. While males tended to make statements such as," site-based management," or "more local control," females wrote of " being a facilitator in team building," and "creating a site-based management team." Thus men seemed to view site-based management more as a "thing," while women spoke of it as something they were responsible for doing and making happen.

Essential Skills

The final question asked in the survey was " What do you consider to be the five most important skills a new administrator in your position needs to possess? " Skills regarded as important were shared by both male and female administrators. The skills fell into five categories: (a) organizational and planning (b) interpersonal and relational (c) technical and administrative (d) curricular and instructional. (e) personal attributes.

Organizational and Planning

The skills most often mentioned as necessary by individuals of both genders were those dealing with organizing and planning. These skills were distributed into two categories a) organizing to handle the work of the school ,and b)organizing for their own survival. Skills needed for the efficient operation of the school dealt with managing the school and being adept in the planning process. Typical listings of these skills were "the ability to organize school tasks," "establish and meet goals" "create a vision," and "engage in evaluating and assessing needs."

Skills needed to enable principals to succeed in meeting the demands made upon them included such things, as "time management," "being able to delegate," "learning how to manage the workload," and "knowing when to go home." Females made more comments than males about the "heavy workload," and about being able to "balance everything, " particularly when dealing with" home and family."

Interpersonal and relational

Strong interpersonal and relational skills were mentioned almost as often as organization and planning skills by both males and females. Comments indicative of these skills were "having strong people skills," and "caring about people." Males tended to use terms such as "people or human relations skills" while females wrote more often of needing "interpersonal skills." Once again, females spoke about the need to "build internal teams," while this was not mentioned by males.

Interpersonal and relational skills were identified as being required to deal effectively with internal relationships and external constituencies. There were many references to being a "communicator" and being able to "communicate" with faculty and students. There was also an emphasis on receptive skills such as being a "listener" "encouraging others," and being able to bring about "conflict resolution." There were also numerous comments dealing with the ability to " supervise others," or having "supervisory skills." Principals of both genders also noted the importance of being able to positively impact perceptions of those outside of the school including parents, the press, and community members. There were many comments about the importance of being able to deal effectively with "public relations."

Curricular and instructional

There were almost as many comments about needing skills related to curriculum and instruction as there were items related to interpersonal and relational skills. Males and females identified the need to have knowledge of instructional and curriculum issues such as "child development," "diverse instructional strategies," and "understanding the learning process." One area noted very often was the ability to "evaluate and assess" instruction and teachers who deliver it. Principals also stressed the need to be an "instructional leader." However, the semantics used by males and females were different. Men most frequently used comments dealing with the need to have "knowledge of curriculum and instruction," and females most often used statements such as "providing leadership in the instructional area."

Technical and Administrative

Male and female principals both recognized the need to possess skills necessary to manage the school and there appeared to be no differences in their approach to or identification of these skills. There were some areas in which skills were identified at the knowledge level. Among these were laws and legal issues particularly in special education and finance, understanding the finance and accounting systems, and having in-depth knowledge of change theory.

Other administrative skills involved having expertise to assure the smooth operation of the school. Among those most often cited were the ability to use technology; expertise in finance and budgeting; effective plant management, scheduling, and maintenance; maintaining an orderly and safe school ; dealing effectively with student discipline; and applying personnel management skills.

Personal Attributes

Principals identified some personal qualities as essential skills. Although they might not traditionally be classified as a skill they were mentioned so many times we decided to include them.. We labeled them as (a) the ability to tackle issues, and (b) personal character. The ability to tackle issues included the skills of having a task orientation, being able to make decisions, and having the capacity to solve problems. These abilities were mentioned equally by males and females as vital for success.

There were three categories identified as necessary qualities of personal character a) concern for others (b) flexibility, and (c) personal strength. Respondents indicated that principals must display a genuine concern for others by being "caring," "patient," "understanding," "encouraging," and positive." They responded that principals must also be flexible. Comments related to this attribute were principals must be able to "deal with change," "be adaptable," and "be continuously open to learning." Respondents also noted that principals must possess personal strength which will enable them to transmit a "clear vision of what they wish to

accomplish," "take criticism," "display courage," "maintain a high energy level," "tolerate stress," and "persevere."

Discussion

The Principalship in Alabama

The findings suggest that the role of the principal in Alabama, like the role in other states is a challenging and demanding one (Kochan, Jackson & Duke. In Press; Spencer & Kochan, 1997). External pressures particularly those related to state mandates, the budgeting system, and accountability measures have increased stress, paperwork, and workload. The combination of increased accountability with inadequate financial resources have made the job more difficult requiring principals to have enhanced public relations and communication skills. Forces in the society which have impacted values, families, and communication have expanded the responsibilities of the school principal. Internal issues related to communication, interpersonal relationships, and the smooth operation of the school are also challenges these principals face.

It appears throughout all the data that principals are struggling with the state accounting system and that budgeting and finance is an area of extreme frustration for them. The system is less that two years old and seems to be a cause for great consternation. The state would do well to reexamine this system and provide additional resources to help and support principals who must work with it. Among the possibilities might be networking, mentoring, additional training sessions, and the development of guidebooks or computer programs to assist in the learning process. Superintendents and the state should also examine the possibility of funding resources to provide more accounting help at the school level so that principals will not have to expend inordinate amounts of time dealing with this area of their job.

These principals recognize that working with teachers and staff and those internal to the school system requires strong interpersonal and communication skills. University preparation programs should ensure that students are provided diverse opportunities to develop such skills

through simulations, case studies, and field experiences. Similar opportunities for developing skills to work with the community including public relation strategies, communication skills, and fund-raising techniques might be of value.

The growth in student and family needs and increasing disciplinary problems suggest that the state and school systems should consider enhancing the funding formula to expand counseling and guidance personnel and provide additional psychological services at the school level. Providing training for teachers and principals in alternative behavioral management strategies and legal issues related to student discipline and special education might also be beneficial.

Principals stress the importance of their role as an instructional leaders who need to understand children, teaching, and learning. They also believe they must be knowledgeable in the field of technology. Most comments about technology were very succinct such as " advances in technology, " "computers" so it is difficult to determine if they connect their understanding of technology to their role as instructional leader and an ability to guide teachers in using technology in instruction. Perhaps they did not connect these two in their responses because they do not deal with technology on an instructional level but instead are focused on purchasing issues and using technology primarily in management tasks. It would seem that the "demands of new technology," mentioned in the responses would require that principals be knowledgeable about the use of technology in instruction and that they assume a leadership role in that arena. Whether this is occurring and if not why not, bears further examination.

Among the primary issues principals face are managing their work and their time, and dealing with the stresses, tasks, and responsibilities of the job. Training in time and stress management techniques should be a central part of any educational preparation program. School districts should likewise consider incorporating time and stress management methods into the day to day operations of the system and provide training and support for principals to use them. Perhaps these results make signify that it is also time for districts and the field in general to begin

a conversation about the job of the principal and to consider restructuring the role and its responsibilities in new and comprehensive ways.

It appears that many principals are entering their positions feeling ill prepared to handle the demands of the job. Mechanisms to better prepare them should be considered. Presently a 300 hour internship is required for principal certification. However, these hours can be spread over a year long period and are most often done while individuals are holding full-time jobs. Year-long and intense internships which provide release time from teaching positions, mentoring programs, and other strategies which provide "real-life" experiences for prospective principals, and or induction periods which include mentoring relationships, when they first enter these positions, should be considered .

Gender and the Principalship

There are many similarities in how males and female principals perceive their role. They agreed on most of the most challenging issues. Except for site-based management which was identified more often by females than males, they identified changes in the job quite similarly. They also agreed on the most important skills principals need in the future. However there were also some significant differences in their responses which point to a difference in the way they think about their role.

There is evidence that women view the tasks before them and the ways in which they must deal with them in a more global manner than do males. For example, they identified the need to make the facilities more inviting because they recognized the impact of "deteriorating facilities" on "morale." Likewise, they seem to think in terms of developing a broad base of skills rather than only dealing with a particular task or issue. For example, when speaking of curricular issues they spoke about "providing leadership in the instructional area." They also wrote more often about changing themselves when dealing with challenges of the job. Typically they wrote about "becoming a better time manager," " learning how to delegate," and "becoming a good

facilitator."

Men on the other hand seem to approach the tasks in a more linear, less integrated fashion. Thus although they seldom mentioned facilities as a problem, when they did they did not relate this to anything else. When dealing with instruction their typical responses spoke of "having knowledge of curriculum," or "understanding instruction." When dealing with challenges they wrote primarily about such things as " getting the work done," "completing everything expected of me." " finding time to complete the paperwork."

The second area of difference between male and female responses deals with role perception. Females in this study seem to conceptualize their role as that of someone responsible for leading and becoming an effective leader. Their concept of leadership is one of "building teams," "providing leadership to others, " and creating "trusting climates." They identified site-based management as a change in the job three times as often as men which tends to support their perspective of leadership as a collaborative act. In contrast, men spoke more often of management and control rather than of leadership. They presented their role through comments such as " getting people to do things" "hiring quality people," and "getting rid of apathetic teachers."

These findings appear to support other research that indicates that men and women lead organizations differently (Shakeshaft, 1989; Rosener, McAllister & Stephens (1990), and that women view leadership as collaborative (Loden, 1985, Shakeshaft, 1986; Grogan, 1996).

The Status of Females in the Principalship

Female respondents in this survey comprise 37% of the principals, which is slightly lower than the state figure of 38% and the national average of 42 %. From the perspective of women seeking these positions, there is "good news" and "bad news." The findings suggest that although there has been an increase in the number of females entering the principalship in recent years, those who are in these positions have higher levels of education and more teaching experience

than their male counterparts. While it appears that opportunities are opening up, one-third of the females moved directly to the principalship from their teaching role. This lack of experience would tend to make the learning curve quite intensive for them . This may explain the finding that more females than males identified a lack of experience and the overwhelming workload as one of the major challenges they faced when they assumed their positions. The need to balance home and family was mentioned only by females, which may also help explain why the workload issue was noted more often by women than men.

A correlating problem is that these females seldom have a female role model to emulate or confide in which might partially explain the comments made by some of them related to the challenge of "being the only female principal." While the lack of a role model may have the advantage of allowing a new principal to be more open to new ideas it can also be the source of many difficulties including making political or technical errors and displaying a lack of confidence (Greenfield,1983). Having a role model provides validation for those entering a new role which is particularly important for traditional outsiders, such as women. The benefit of this validation suggests that the advantages of having a role model outweigh the disadvantages (Hart, 1995; Pence, 1995).

An issue that may also be troubling for females is that while most principals are appointed to positions within the county in which they work, those selected for these positions from outside their county are predominately male. Whether this is the result of females having less mobility than males or is an indication of some type of discriminatory attitude in educational systems is something that bears further investigation.

The disparity of females in the principalship relative to their numbers in the teaching force, may be the result of many factors: tradition, hiring practices, female unwillingness or reluctance to seek the role (Griffin, 1997), or issues related to family needs. This finding bears further study and examination within the state and school system structures. However, universities and school

systems can take some actions to help deal with the status of women in these positions. Programs of educational administration and school systems should consider establishing programs to identify, educate, and encourage females to enter the administrative ranks.

School districts should also examine their hiring practices and/or establish programs to groom and prepare female leaders in a systemic manner to assure that opportunities for advancement are made more apparent and equal between the genders. Since mentoring is seldom available for these women school systems and educational leadership programs should also consider creating mentoring opportunities for them (Funk & Kochan, In Press). In addition, "women-friendly" promotion structures that recognize the special career patterns of females related to childbearing and childbearing, proposed by Griffin (1997) and the alternate career model proposed by Grant (1989) should be reviewed and considered as avenues for assuring fair and equitable opportunities are available for females to enter the administrative ranks.

Questions and reflections

Some intriguing question arise regarding the male/female differences uncovered in this study. First since females have fewer years in the job than males it is possible that females in this group have been involved in taking university coursework more recently than males. If this is true, it is quite probable that their classwork focused on collaboration and site-based management which is now a more prevalent model in educational leadership programs than in the previous decade. They also would have entered the principalship at a time when notions of site-based management have become more prevalent in the field.

A related issue is whether females have a different perspective because they have not as yet been socialized into the traditional approach to the principalship. Although collaborative leadership may be prevalent in the literature and talk in the field, whether schools have really been restructured around such leadership and empowered school staffs is questionable (Elmore, 1995; Bishop, P.W. & Mulford. W.L. 1996; Leithwood, K. & Menzeos. T. 1998). It is very difficult

for those entering an organization to challenge and change its norms (Hart, 1995). Additionally the relationship between the superintendent and the principals who work for him/her influences the culture of the schools and district (Burns, 1978). Since 98 % of the superintendents in Alabama are males. If their concept of leadership is not based on a collaborative model, females may be find it difficult to build the collaborative cultures they presently espouse.

Thus one may question whether female principals will be able to keep and implement their beliefs about being facilitative leaders or whether, in time, like the principals in Crow and Glascock's (1996) study, their focus of site-base management will change from" facilitating teachers work to being the sole authority" (p.38). In dealing with this issue Schmuck and Schubert (1994) suggest that because of the patriarchal nature of the structure of schools, females in school administration will become socialized into the status quo. A follow-up study examining female responses based on years of experience might be helpful in addressing this issue.

Conclusion

This study has added to the knowledge base about the principalship in Alabama and about issues of gender related to this role. It appears that individuals in these positions are experiencing the job in ways similar to their counterparts across the country. Women appear to be viewing their role somewhat differently than men. However the combination of the minority status of women in terms of numbers, the traditions of the role, and the impact that socialization into this position may have on them as they remain in the job over time is unknown.

An important issue for consideration is that the findings of this study are based on personal stated beliefs. Thus the extent to which the leadership theory espoused by females in this study is also the theory practiced is also unknown. Often these two theories conflict. Sometimes differences exist between the two because the espoused theory is what someone thinks they

should believe rather than an internal belief or value. At other times it may be the result of *contextual or situational barriers that prevent individuals from practicing what they believe and* value (Robinson & Kochan, 1999). Further research into the way in which these males and females operate in their settings would enrich our understanding and enable us to determine the extent to which beliefs espoused are being put into practice.

The gender differences identified in this research, suggest that males and females may have to be dealt with differently in educational and field environments. Likewise the issues of beliefs, values, and ways educational leaders deal with people need to be examined more closely, discussed more thoroughly, and researched more fully.

The role of the principal in Alabama has become more complex and stressful. Innovative approaches should be developed and adopted to prepare individuals to fill this role, to support them as they perform it, and to reconfigure the tasks and responsibilities within it so that the stress and demands they face can be reduced and their talents can be used to improve instruction, create positive learning and teaching environments, and build support for our schools in the broader community.

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